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Author(s): C. Clayton Childress

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# Evolutions in the Literary Field: The Co-Constitutive Forces of Institutions, Cognitions, and Networks

C. Clayton Childress\*

**Abstract:** »Entwicklungen im literarischen Feld: Das Zusammenwirken von Institutionen, Kognitionen und Netzwerken«. Using the case-study of Odyssey Editions, an e-book publishing imprint created by literary agent Andrew Wylie, this work examines recent developments in the U.S. literary field. In lieu of a technologically deterministic focus on the effects of digital transitions within the book industry, the evolution of relations within the field's interdependent network structure, shifts in cognitive approaches to tasks and roles, and field-wide institutional orientations toward "blockbuster" texts and "brand-name" authors are highlighted. These three co-constitutive forces have created structural holes within the literary field that entrepreneurial players such as Wylie have worked to fill.

**Keywords:** book publishing, literary Field, culture, production of culture.

## Odyssey Editions

In late July of 2010 the famed literary agent Andrew Wylie launched Odyssey Editions, a twenty title e-book publishing imprint that would supply titles to Amazon.com through an exclusive two year contract. Since the mid-1980s Wylie has been known in American publishing circles as "the Jackal" for his insistence that the book publishing industry, which has traditionally thought of itself as an "occupation for gentleman," should be treated more like a business, with agents negotiating more strongly for authors' interests (Warburg 1959; Thompson 2010).<sup>1</sup> While there are nearly three hundred publishing houses

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\* Address all communications to: Clayton Childress, Department of Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA 93107, United States; e-mail: ccchildress@gmail.com.

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<sup>1</sup> Warburg's turn of phrase and book title come from an exchange at a dinner party when he was asked if publishing was an actual business, or merely an occupation for gentlemen. With regards to the question as it relates to Wylie and his nickname, he did disregard the "gentleman's" agreement between agents about not poaching authors. Yet in turn and as discussed, the "gentlemanly" nature of publishing also included agents orienting their bro-

registered with the American Association of Publishers and over ten thousand U.S. publishers using publisher pre-fix codes to register for ISBNs in any given year, the announcement of Odyssey Editions sent shockwaves through the industry. In response to Wylie's announcement of Odyssey Editions, the *Guardian* proclaimed that "publishers came face to face with their vision of the apocalypse yesterday" and that "the end of publishing [was] nigh" (Lea 2010: 1).

At stake were the electronic backlist rights for many of the most celebrated authors and titles that Wylie had represented, including Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and John Updike's *Rabbit* series. The print backlist rights for Odyssey titles were owned by the "Big 4" publishing firms (Random House, Penguin, HarperCollins, Simon & Schuster), which control over 40% of the total American market. A publisher's backlist – older releases, most frequently seen in paperback editions – represent between thirty and fifty percent of sales for most major firms. Backlist titles are highly desirable revenue generators as they don't require new expenditures in the editorial wing of the house and sell somewhat predictably in what is otherwise a largely unpredictable market for creative goods (Woll 2002; Caves 2000). Wylie argued that the proposed Odyssey titles, written between the 1950s and 1980s, were his to publish in electronic format as the original contracts with the "Big 4" firms did not include mention of digital rights. With e-books as a growth category in what is otherwise a stable-to-declining book market the ensuing stakes between Wylie and Random House were large. Always attuned to authors' rights (and likewise, his fifteen percent fee), Wylie argued that authors deserved more than the proposed twenty five percent of profits collected through digital sales from traditional publishing houses.<sup>2</sup> The major publishers disagreed. John Sargent, CEO of MacMillan, wrote that if Andrew Wylie "wants to attempt to disintermediate publishers, that is his right ... [but] I'll be knocking on his door shortly, asking him for dues to the A[merican] A[ssociation of] P[ublishers]" and Random House announced that they would not consider submissions from any of the 700 authors Wylie represented until Random House titles were removed from Odyssey's offerings (Andriani 2010: 1). Bowing to Random House's pressure, Wylie stripped Odyssey Editions

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kerage roles towards publisher's interests. Wylie reversed this emphasis by orienting towards authors' interests, and as such, part of the "gentlemanly" nature of publishing might also be interpreted as quite less than that, and as instead motivated by publisher's self-interest in creating firm-favoring contracts with authors. Wylie is not shy about having broken from either of these traditions.

<sup>2</sup> Similar disputes about royalty rates have also beset the recorded music industry, with a recent suit filed against Universal Music Group. The suit contends that due to no mention of digital sales in older contracts and the lack of marginal costs for printing individual copies on digital sales, artists should be compensated at the 50% royalty rate for licensing fees as opposed to the 12% royalty rate for traditional album sales (Sisario 2011).

down to seven titles, none of which were controlled by Random House, and re-entered negotiations with Random House for increased percentages for authors on digital sales. In industry trade publications and the popular press this standoff between Wylie and the major publishing firms focused on the causal effects of new digital technologies on the evolving literary landscape. The *Guardian* opined that “once upon a time publishers were the only ones who could find authors, edit manuscripts, print books and distribute them, but new technology from desktop computers to the internet has thrown the doors wide open” (Lea 2010: 1). Others, such as the American Authors Guild, directed their criticism not toward Wylie but toward his exclusive e-book contract partner, Amazon.com, writing that “Amazon has, time and again, wielded its clout in the industry ruthlessly, with little apparent regard for its relationships with authors or publishers” (Bosman 2010: C6).

The notion that digital transitions in the field are central to the story of the Odyssey standoff is in line with other recent developments within book publishing. Yet solely focusing on digital transitions, however, borders on technological determinism and bellies an investigation of other important evolutions in the field over the last forty years. I argue that it is in fact these historical developments and evolving relationships between players in the literary field that created the conditions under which the Odyssey standoff might take place. I begin with the theoretical underpinning of my analysis, arguing that a focus on U.S. trade publishing as an industry or market is too narrow, and instead, Bourdieu’s wider conception of field and its allowance for extra-industry firms and influences allows for a deeper understanding of both transitions within the trade publishing industry, and the wider literary field as whole. I focus on three interrelated forces – social networks, cognitions, and institutions – as suggested by Beckert (2010), to analyze the field-level evolutions that created the conditions for the current moment and the possibility for the Odyssey standoff to take place. With regards to networks, I highlight the institutional embeddedness (Granovetter 1985) of firms within the field, and resulting structural holes (Burt 1992) that emerged and could be filled by a player such as Wylie. I treat cognitions as the evolving roles within the trade book supply chain taken up by different players. All participants in the field add values to the chain, yet the tasks they take on to add values are historically situated and negotiated. I treat institutions as industry wide norms and accepted patterns of belief within the field, including transitions to a field-wide orientation toward “blockbuster” publishing strategies and “brand-name” authors. I close by returning to the case of Odyssey Editions, highlighting the interrelated forces of evolving network relations, cognitions, and institutions that explain both the opening for a venture such as Odyssey Editions, as well as the ultimate resolution of the conflict. While I make no predictive claims about future evolutions in the field, I highlight several possible consequences of these developments and tie them to other recent cases in the literary field.

## Theoretical Background

Bourdieu (1993) characterizes the literary field as a semi-autonomous structural arena of social relations and related actions. The field is made up both of individuals and organizations which employ various forms of capital – economic, cultural, and social – in a jostling for domination over others in the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Fields are both regulating (i.e. a field of “forces”), and subject to changes through contestations over positions within them (i.e. a field of “struggles”). Structural arrangements within the field and the evolution of the field as a whole are regulated by the power enacted by those with high degrees of capital who benefit from the current social arrangements of the field and the normalized “rules of engagement.” Those within the field looking to improve their structural positions deploy their varied sites of capital to take advantage of pockets within the “space of possible.” These spaces,

which transcend individual agents, function as a kind of system of common reference which causes contemporary directors, even when they do not consciously refer to each other, to be objectively situated in relation to the others, to the extent that they are all interrelated as a function of the same system of intellectual coordinates and points of reference.” (Bourdieu 1993: 176-177)

At stake in this struggle over positions in the literary field is a “monopoly of the power to consecrate, in which the value of works of art and belief in that value are continuously generated” (Bourdieu 1993: 78). As the “gatekeeper of ideas” (Coser 1975), publishing houses have traditionally held the authority to accept or deny authors and their manuscripts into field, and have employed their considerable economic, social, and cultural capital to preserve their position as necessary interlocutors and providers of values. I argue that within the modern literary field, however, this gatekeeping function has transformed into a key site of contestation.

Bourdieu’s relational framework therefore provides three key values for an examination of evolutions within trade publishing. Firstly, Bourdieu (1993), and others (Anand and Peterson 2000; Fligstein 2001), establish the boundaries of the field through participants’ orientation toward it, allowing for a wider domain of forces and players than may be captured through a narrow focus on the publishing industry. For example, the emergence of amateur “surrogate consumers” (Hirsch 1972), that is, those who review and recommend specific works on Amazon, GoodReads and their personal blogs without formal employment within the trade publishing industry, create values for those within the industry through word-of-mouth sales.<sup>3</sup> Despite a lack of institutional ar-

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<sup>3</sup> In my fieldwork in the American trade publishing industry through 2008 and 2009, publishing firms were actively engaged in trying to figure out ways to “harness the power” of independent, amateur reviewers, who through the deployment of social capital do have con-

rangement, the orientation of these players toward the products of the field and the promotional values they add to it readjusts the relations between inter-industry players, and may allow for new strategies in position taking. Likewise, self-published authors who cannot gain access to the publishing industry and would otherwise be left out of the analysis may also adopt strategies to improve their status within the field, and as highlighted below, may resultantly change the structure of relations for traditional industry-level players.

Secondly, Bourdieu's relational approach allows for conflicting struggles for domination over other firms trying to occupy a similar position, as well as mutually constitutive relations of interdependency across different firms within the field. While publishing houses may compete with other publishing houses to be the dominant publishing firm within the field (e.g. in possession of the most resources to offer the highest author advances during auctions, or cultural capital that can lead to increased sales through winning major literary awards), they are also dependent on other firms within the field who compete along different measures for different positions (e.g. agents who compete with other agents to sign and retain the most promising authors, booksellers who compete with other booksellers to attract the most customers, reviewers who compete with other reviewers to garner the most readers or to be consecrated as the authoritative evaluator of published works within a specific domain). While firms may also compete with other firms to take up previously uncontested roles (e.g. the potential overlap between literary agents and publishing houses, in the case of Wylie's Odyssey Editions), the interdependent if sometimes conflicting positions taken within the field allow for a system of constraints, as well as a system in which change in relations may emerge.

Thirdly, Bourdieu's relational approach allows for both a structure of constraints within the field, and the agency of individual players in the field who may enact strategies to better their positions. In the literary field, these strategies can be considered as oriented toward other similar firms (i.e. the push to be the dominant publishing house), or toward the field as a whole (i.e. the dominant player within the field). Such may be the case with Amazon, which not only competes with other booksellers for domination within the domain of bookselling, but which also, as noted above by the American Authors Guild, "wielded its clout in the industry ruthlessly, with little apparent regard for its relationships with authors or publishers" (Bosman 2010: C6). It is these tensions between the structure of the field and the agency of players within it that Beckert (2010) highlights for tripartite analysis.

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siderable sway through online "word-of-mouth" book sales (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006). That amateur reviewers are diffuse non-industry players has made their power particularly difficult to harness, despite acknowledgement and orientation to their presence as value adders in the field.

Beckert (2010) notes that in economic sociology networks, cognitions, and institutional forces have traditionally been treated as separate domains for analysis in the evolution of markets. He suggests that in lieu of individuated analyses, evolving network relations, cognitive frameworks, and institutional practices may all serve as forces in change, either working in concert to change the dynamic arrangements of fields, or buttressing against each other as regulating or normalizing inputs. With regards to the stabilizing force of networks, Granovetter (1985) argues that individuals and firms are embedded in relations based on both trust and opportunities. Traditionally, the most central firms within networks are thought to be the most structurally powerful players, controlling relationships across the network, and negotiating information flows between less connected agents (Wasserman and Faust 1994; Freeman 2004; Scott 1991). Those rich in social capital can control relations and alter institutional and cognitive frameworks within the network. In this traditional view of network control, one might predict a “Matthew Effect” in which central players accumulate greater capital over time, and marginal, less centralized players decrease in capital over time (Merton 1968).

Yet while a high degree of centrality within a network may allow a firm to preserve its position of structural power, highly embedded firms are also vulnerable to evolutions in the network structure.

As Uzzi (1996; 1997) notes, firms may be *over-embedded* within networks, and resultantly be less prepared for exogenous shocks to the system, or have less access to novel information that may induce weaker firms into strategic relational adjustments. Likewise, Burt (1992; 2002) notes that while network studies have traditionally leaned toward an analysis of the structure of ties within a network, this emphasis may be inverted in an investigation of non-ties, or structural holes within the network in which new ties can form. When structural holes are present within a network, as may be the case in the literary field, entrepreneurs can become boundary spanners, shortening path lengths between intermediaries by connecting previously unconnected players. Burt also finds that these boundary spanners may have greater access to novel ideas and information (2004), and as such, the filling of structural holes can reconfigure the relationships and power arrangements of players within the network.

In turn, I treat cognitions as the tasks and frames by which actors and firms in different positions in the literary field understand and make sense of their roles. As DiMaggio (1997: 283) notes, “social structures exist simultaneously through mental representations and in concrete social relations,” and shifting interpretations of roles through cognitive frames can be internalized through position within the field, or diffuse out to alter relationships (Lizardo and Strand 2010). These frames, or, “cognitive ‘how-to’ rules, are part of a socially inscribed meaning structure operating in a market field through which firms and other field actors assess situations and define their responses” (Beckert (2010: 610). Cognitive frameworks can diffuse out through networks, or be

internalized from surrounding socio-structural network relations. They can fortify the logics of fields or disrupt them. For workers in cultural fields, cognitive frames “can either be a stabilizing influence on dominant frames or one that transforms prevalent cognitive frameworks if the actors entering into the market field have been socialized into a different mindset than the incumbents” (Beckert 2010: 618). Within the literary field new entrants and shifting roles may create either evolving network relations, evolving cognitive scripts, or evolutions of both networks and cognitive orientations.

While cognitive frames are treated as taken-for-granted, “how-to rules” for actions taken up by individual firms or agents, I treat institutions as field-level orientations and meaning structures. These field-level meaning structures may contribute to the rationalization and normalization of fields (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Fligstein 1990; Mohr and Duquenne 1997), while also orienting or reorienting players within the fields to new goals or accepted norms for action (Thornton 2004; Andrews and Napoli 2006). Institutional beliefs may be rationalized as enduring, “normal”, or simply “best practices” that standardize conventional wisdoms across the field (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Fligstein 2001). In the creative industries such institutional beliefs may orient toward “blockbuster” business practices (Thompson 2010), a collective belief in the efficacy of market research for creative goods (Napoli 2010), or the reorientation of the field toward a market-oriented logic (Thornton 2004). For the sake of analytic clarity I first treat evolutions in network structure, cognitions, and institutions in the literary field in isolation, although the order in their presentation is trivial. I close by highlighting the co-constitutive nature of these three interrelated forces and their concomitant effects on what would become the Odyssey Editions standoff.

## Evolutions in Network Structure: The Emergence of Literary Agents as the Gatekeepers of Ideas

As Thompson (2010: 100) notes, “it is vital to see that the field of trade publishing does not consist only of publishers ... [as] there are other players who inhabit this field and who exercise a great deal of power within it.” Although publishing houses have traditionally been the central players in the literary field and served as the preliminary gatekeeper between authors and the marketplace, since the 1970s publishing firms have ceded control of their gatekeeping function to literary agents, while also losing their status as impassible intermediaries in the book supply chain. As such, publishing firms remain key players in the literary field, while experiencing decreased social capital and structural control over the literary system in total. Central to the present case are the shifts between publishing houses and literary agents.

In the United States, literary agents emerged in the mid-1880s as the primary handlers of contract rights between authors and publishers. Through the

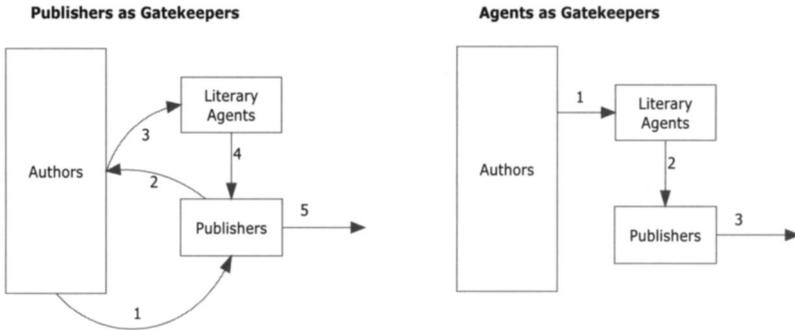
1960s, literary agents functioned as “double agents”, and were regularly recommended to authors by publishing houses (Thompson 2010: 67). Agents largely operated under boilerplate contracts drawn up by publishers, and served as an intermediary between authors and publishers on the “business side” of books. They negotiated the contractual obligations between authors and publishers while the author and editor engaged in the creative side of developing manuscripts and building authors’ careers. Publishers served the primary gate-keeping function in the literary system, accepting or rejecting manuscripts from authors and linking up authors with agents who might represent them. With regards to the evolving presence of agents in the literary field, de Bellaigue (2008) estimates that ten to twelve percent of published authors were agented prior to the Second World War, with around fifty percent of published authors agented by the 1960s, ninety percent by the late 1990s and somewhere closer to ninety nine and one half percent of all authors with books at major trade houses agented by 2008.

The rise of literary agents in the late 1960s and early 1970s can be attributed to a multitude of factors, including the growth of the marketplace as caused by the rise of chain bookstores and a resultant growth in revenues for authors. Authors and publishers additionally experienced an increased need for complex rights managements and negotiations as a result of synergistic media strategies (e.g. television and movie deals) and multi-market global publishing rights. At the same time, the conglomeration and consolidation of publishing firms led to a) an increased workload for editors who had less time to hunt for new talent in the “slush pile” of un-agented submissions, b) a pool of laid-off acquisition editors with the cognitive “know how” for selecting manuscripts that might make it through the field, and c) increased barriers to entry for employment at publishing firms at a time when literary agents were in need (see Thompson 2010; Sapiro 2010; Keh 1998; de Bellaigue 2008; Coser et al. 1982; Tebbel 1987; Bonn 1994; Greco 2005). While publishing firms were laying off editorial staff, the need for literary agents was rising, and as a completely unregulated occupation, anyone, including laid-off editors, could call themselves a literary agent and sign authors from offices within their homes.

As conglomerated firms grew larger and editors were tasked with taking on more projects, the “discovery” of new talent was largely farmed out to literary agents, some of whom, like Wylie in 1980, had consolidated into firms. Publishing firms lamented the time and resources wasted on the “slush pile” of un-agented manuscripts sent to them by authors, and the low success rates at finding what they deemed to be publishable works within them. While publishers would traditionally recommend agents to the authors of manuscripts they had purchased, these roles were inverted, with agents taking on the task of the “slush pile”, “discovering” and honing manuscripts, and delivering them to the publishing houses which might “fit” the manuscript. Whereas in the early 1980s Coser, Kadushin, and Powell (1982) lamented that some major publish-

ing firms had ceased accepting un-agented manuscripts, by the turn of the 21st Century no major trade publishing firms in the United States would consider the submission of an un-agented manuscript. These shifts fundamentally changed the structural relationships of authors, agents, and publishers in the literary field (see Figure 1), as literary agents became “the necessary point of entry” into the literary field (Thompson 2010: 69), and the preliminary gatekeepers of the literary supply chain (Caves 2000; 2003; Bonn 1994).

Figure 1: The Gatekeeping Function, from Publishers to Agents

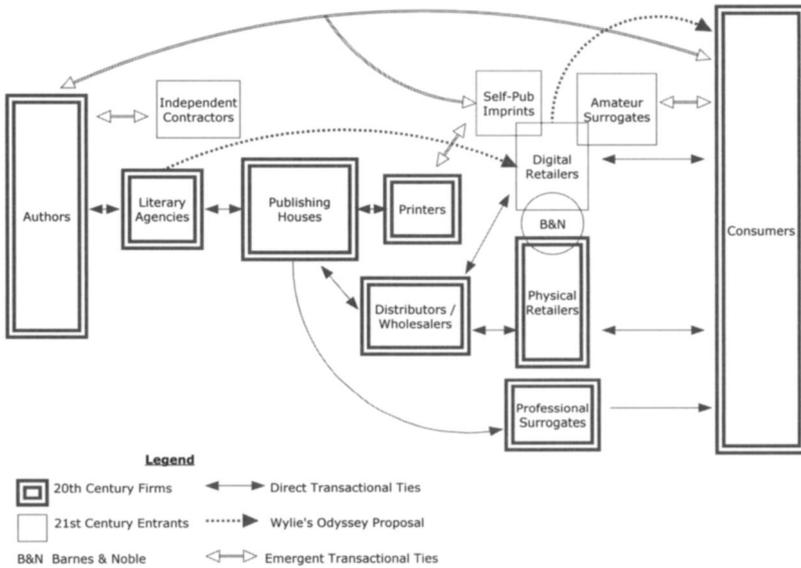


Likewise, additional entrants into the publishing field in the latter half of the 20th Century and early 21st Century have also fundamentally changed the structural relationship between firms. These entrants opened up spaces for new ties to form in the ultimate linkage between writers to readers. I identify eight key types of players that made up the literary field through the 20th Century: Authors, Literary Agents, Publishers, Printers, Distributors & Wholesalers, Surrogate Consumers (e.g. book reviewers), physical (i.e. “brick-and-mortar”) Retailers, and Consumers. These players can be thought of as endogenously independent (i.e. a publishing house can operate without a competing publishing house) yet exogenously interdependent (i.e. a publishing house cannot operate without a retail outlet) players within the field that add values to the book supply chain (Keh 1998; Thompson 2010). While there is surely more than one publishing house in the publishing industry, in this ideal-type case publishing houses occupy a structural space within the publishing supply chain. As seen with the changing structural arrangement between authors, agents and publishers, these different players are embedded within a network of firms that regularly do direct business with each other.<sup>4</sup> As such, in the ideal-type authors

<sup>4</sup> As agents are paid through a percentage of authors’ advances, the specialization of agents may lead to increased transactions costs, both for authors and publishers. This is excused within the industry by agents’ double-role. For publishers agents take on the preliminary

have ties to literary agents because they regularly work directly with literary agents to gain access to the traditional publishing industry. Authors, however, do not have ties to printers as authors and printers do not regularly directly negotiate values, contracts, or terms. Instead, authors are tied to printers *through* agents and *through* publishing houses, which serve as intermediaries in the author-printer relationship (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Direct and Emergent Transactional Ties in the Literary Field



New entrants in the field include 1) independent contractors such as cover designers, copy editors, and typesetters who moonlight to supplement their incomes or work wholly independently after their positions have been retracted as a result of horizontal growth strategies within publishing firms (Szenberg and Lee 1994), 2) digital retailers such as Amazon, now the largest book retailer in the U.S. industry, who have emerged in the last 15 years, 3) self-publishing imprints which now outstrip the total output (if not sales) of the traditional industry supply chain by a ratio of 2.5:1, and 4) amateur surrogate

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gatekeeping function (and the time/labor investment in winnowing extra-industry manuscripts and authors), and some of the publisher's editorial work by using their editorial and industry expertise to prepare manuscripts for commerce. On the other side, agents are compensated through authors' advances and have a personal economic stake in procuring higher advances for their authors. As such the system is excused by all parties as it arguably provides labor values to publishers and monetary values to authors.

consumers such as the non-professional book reviewers on Amazon, GoodReads, Shelfari, and LibraryThing. As discussed below, these new entrants to the field add values to the book supply chain, while also structurally altering the relational network of players within the field.

As seen in Figure 2, Macmillan CEO John Sargent's claim that Wylie's Odyssey Edition was trying to "disintermediate publishers" was wholly accurate. Wylie saw the rise of digital retailers and his increased social capital with authors in the literary system as an opportunity to fill a structural hole within the industry by short-circuiting the traditional publishing system, shortening his path to consumers from five steps (from Wylie → Publisher → Printer → Wholesaler → Retailer → Consumers) to two steps (from Wylie → Amazon → Consumers).

### Evolution in Cognition: Role Overlap and Evolution in the Tasks taken on by Firms

Every player in the literary field adds value, or competes to be the player who will add value, to books as they pass through the literary supply chain (Clark and Phillips 1988; Greco 2005). These values are not purely economic, and instead come in many different forms. While reviewers provide promotional value through their cultural and social capital, printers provide value by engaging in the physical manufacturing of books. Publishing houses have been and remain the primary infuser of economic values in the literary field, as they are the primary financial risk takers for individual projects. While authors and agents may waste valuable time working on unsalable projects, their start-up costs (minus time) are quite low, and may not amount to much more than a computer and Internet connection. It is the author's advance paid by a publishing house, a financial risk on a book that may not sell, that authors and agents divvy up regardless of whether the publisher is able to garner a return on their investment. Likewise, printers, distributors, and independent contractors are paid in accordance with their contracts, and take no financial risks on the salability of particular books. Surrogate consumers such as reviewers use the raw materials supplied by authors, agents and publishers (given to them gratis in hopes of a review) to create "secondary texts" (Fiske 1987) that will hopefully induce increased consumption. Likewise, as a holdover from the Great Depression, bookstores also take minimal financial risks on individual books, as they can return unsold products to publishing houses. Typically returns of this type account for about 30% of all books printed, even if publishers have taken on greater financial risk by renting placement for their books on the front tables of bookstores in the hopes they'll sell instead of being returned. As such the publishing house is the player in the field that amortizes the financial risk for individual books across the literary supply chain (Keh 1998; Woll 2002).

While one of the roles of the publishing house is to be the primary financial risk taker in the field, this is not the only type of value that is added to the system, as other firms who do not take on primary financial risks for individual products still add values. The contributions of developmental expertise, promotion, and relationships (i.e. cultural and social capital) that other players offer must be harnessed if books written by authors are to make it across the field and be purchased by readers. For example, authors add value to the field by supplying manuscripts (i.e. the raw materials for books), distributors and wholesalers promote works to bookstores and manage distribution chains, reviewers promote books by making readers aware of their release and by arguing for or against (and usually for) their cultural value, and retailers add value by handling consumer transactions.

These roles and the cognitive know-how of what one's role is and how tasks specific to the role are to be accomplished have undergone significant changes in the late 20th and early 21st Century. As discussed above, the transitions from publishing houses to literary agents as the primary gatekeepers of the literary field not only involved an evolution in the network structure between authors, agents, and publishers, but also involved a shifting of roles. Whereas publishers once took on the role of winnowing the extra-industry talent pool of authors in the field, literary agents became the specialists of this task, and this shift in roles emerged with a concurrent shift in how agents understood and enacted their jobs within the literary system (see Table 1).

On one end of the literary supply chain publishing houses have scaled back not only in "discovering" new writers, but also in their engagement with editorial work which is now a role taken on increasingly by literary agents and within networks of authors (Greenberg 2010). Likewise, authors are not only evaluated by publishing houses on the content of their work, but also with regards to their "platform," meaning the promotional networks they can utilize to increase awareness of their work. With the move to self or co-financed author tours and an increased reliance on authors' own ability to promote themselves (a role that many newly published authors are surprised to learn is not simply the duty of the publishing house) authors have begun to share responsibility for the role and sites of value traditionally held by publishers (Greco and Wharton 2007).

Table 1: Evolving Industry Role Structure and Values Added

<b>Role/Type</b>	<b>Traditional Model Values Added</b>	<b>+/-Values Added</b>	<b>Emergent Values Added</b>
<i>Authors</i>	<b>Raw Materials (i.e. manuscripts)</b>	+ Fixed Cost for Promotional Tours, + Author Career Development	<b>Raw Materials (i.e. manuscripts)</b> , Fixed Cost for Promotional Tours, Author Career Development
<i>Literary Agents</i>	<b>Contracts, Rights Management for Authors</b>	+ Developmental Editing, + Author Career Development, + Winnowing of Extra-Industry Talent Pool	Contracts, Rights Management for Authors, Developmental Editing, Author Career Development, <b>Winnowing of Extra-Industry Talent Pool</b>
<i>Publishing Houses</i>	<b>Winnowing of Extra-Industry Talent Pool, Author Advances, Developmental Editing, Author Career Development, Rights Management, Fixed Costs for Title Development and Production, Promotional Tours, Ties to Surrogate Consumers, Copy Editing, Typesetting, Packaging, Costs of Remaindering &amp; Returns, Marketing and Promotion to Retailers</b>	-Fixed Costs for Promotional Tours, -Author Career Development, -Winnowing of Extra-Industry Talent Pool, -Copy Editing Typesetting, Packaging	<b>Author Advances</b> , Developmental Editing, Rights Management, <b>Fixed Costs for Title Development and Production</b> , Promotional Tours, Ties to Surrogate Consumers, <b>Cost of Remaindering &amp; Returns</b> , Marketing and Promotion to Retailers
<i>Distributors/Wholesalers</i>	<b>Marketing and Promotion to Retailers</b> , Distribution to Wholesalers and Retailers	N/A	<b>Marketing and Promotion to Retailers</b> , Distribution to Wholesalers and Retailers
<i>Printers</i>	<b>Manufacturing</b>	-Manufacturing	Manufacturing
<i>Surrogate Consumers</i>	Publicity and Promotion for Select Titles	-Publicity and Promotion for Select Titles	Publicity and Promotion for Select Titles
<i>Retailers</i>	Publicity and Promotion for Select Titles (Hand-Selling and Placement), <b>Consumer Transactions</b>	-Publicity and Promotion for Select Titles (Hand-Selling and Placement)	Publicity and Promotion for Select Titles (Hand-Selling and Placement), Consumer Transactions
<i>Consumers</i>	<b>Demand (i.e. ROI on Select Titles)</b>	N/A	<b>Demand (i.e. ROI on Select Titles)</b>

*Table 1 continued...*

<i>Digital Retailers*</i>	N/A	+ Consumer Transactions, + Publicity and Promotion for Select Titles (Reviews and Placement)	Consumer Transactions, Publicity and Promotion for Select Titles (Reviews and Placement)
<i>Independent Contractors*</i>	N/A	+ Copy Editing, Typesetting, Packaging	Copy Editing, Typesetting, Packaging
<i>Amateur Surrogates*</i>	N/A	+ Publicity and Promotion for Select Titles	Publicity and Promotion for Select Titles

\* connotes emergent players in the field, **bolded** text connotes tasks free of competition from other role types.

In total, with regards to the roles that players in the literary field inhabit, there has been an increased overlap in the tasks taken on by different players at the same time that publishers have lost their exclusive claims on adding values beyond the financial obligations of author advances, fixed costs for title development and production, and costs for remaindering and returns (see Table 1). With this increased overlap in roles, supply channels have also diversified, with books that sell through one channel (e.g. a hardcover at an independent brick-and-mortar bookstore) requiring different networks and forms of social capital than required through a different channel (e.g. a self-published Kindle edition only e-book). As is the case with Odyssey Editions, Wylie was able to use his evolving role as an agent in concert with the evolving role of Amazon for the singular case of back-listed e-books. Yet neither Wylie nor Amazon were ready to take on the financial risks or structural relationships required to break a new front-listed title, and it was precisely these sites of capital that Random House relied on when refusing to take on new projects from Wylie until he divested from the Odyssey venture. While Wylie was able to incorporate emergent structural relationships and cognitive frames to advance his venture, in this case, the force of the structural and economic capital held by Random House prevailed.

### Evolutions in Institutional Beliefs: Markets, Big Books, and the Celebrity-Author

While the different players in the literary field have undergone a structural reorganization of their cognitive approaches to their roles in the field, in wider scope the literary field has also reoriented itself toward several concomitant institutional beliefs and practices. These primarily take the form of a field-wide shift in orientation toward market research, a belief in “big books,” and an increased reliance on “celebrity” authors. The orientation toward blockbuster

books and brand-name authors can be attributed to many factors. On the one hand, the conglomeration of smaller and under-capitalized firms into publishing corporations allowed houses to compete with each other through large author advances, raising the monetary stakes on some titles, and pushing firms to return on these investments in the market. On the other hand, as firms consolidated savings were realized by removing redundancies in publicity and sales staffs, overloading the publicity wings of major firms with new titles, and causing an orientation toward pushing “big” titles harder (Thompson 2010; Szenberg and Lee 1994; Whiteside 1981). Likewise the growth of retail chains and rise of heavily discounted mass-market hardbacks allowed for national releases in which the chains could all orient around single titles, in lieu of publishers having to coordinate a mass of independent sellers around a single title. Publishers also gained more control of these push-factors, albeit at a cost, as the large retail chains allowed publishers to enter co-operative deals to put the titles which needed the largest returns to break even at the front of stores (Miller 2007). An orientation toward market research, and new “market information regimes” such as the advent of BookScan at the turn of the 21st Century also allowed publishers both quicker access to accurate sales figures for their own titles and access to industry wide-sales figures, allowing them to capitalize on trends and react more quickly to market demands. While this market information has unearthed previously unrealized niche markets (e.g. the income to be had by heavily promoting new editions of out-of-copyright titles), it has also put the power-law distribution of industry-wide book sales in clearer relief, and may further orient publishers to “blockbuster” titles (Andrews and Napoli 2006).

As creative markets are notoriously fickle and upwards of 80 percent of titles fail to return on investment, through the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, the field also increasingly oriented toward name-brand authors who might offer more predictable sales figures in an otherwise unpredictable market (Moran 1997). While big name books and authors could still prove risky in that they required larger advances, authors with established track records for consistently high sales and titles on “hot” topics or by names with reach across the wider media landscape are thought to be safer investments, and an investment that might allow publishers to continue taking “risks” on titles with less clear sales potential (Caves 2000; Thompson 2010). For example, the books of author James Patterson accounted for six percent of all hardcover fiction books sold in the United States between 2006 and 2010 (Mahler 2010). This orientation toward name-brand authors also increased the structural and cultural capital of literary agents, who, concerned both with growing the careers of their authors and their stake in large advances, further severed the career-length relationships between authors and publishers as they moved from house to house looking for the new best deals. Readers, who have never been particularly oriented toward publishing houses as “brands” (e.g. “I’m thinking about picking up the new Random

House title”), followed celebrity authors regardless of which firms they published with. For example, in 1997 Stephen King rejected a twenty one million dollar advance from Penguin for his next book and published with Simon & Schuster (Thompson 2010: 217). King’s readers followed him to Simon & Schuster as they were loyal to the *Stephen King* brand, with the Penguin brand he was previously attached being mostly incidental for King’s readers.

While publishers readily acknowledge that “all hits are flukes” (Bielby and Bielby 1994), for books by brand-name authors there is a belief that this maxim can be slightly gamed, and more predictable sales can be achieved. Although publishing big name books and authors is not a failsafe strategy (e.g. Charles Frazier’s *Thirteen Moons*, an underselling follow up to *Cold Mountain*, for which he received an eight million dollar advance), the orientation and coordination of the field toward these titles and authors hinge on the platforms of authors who can bring their own readers to their projects. While the industry still relies on product variety as a measure against demand uncertainty, this shift in institutional logics has led to what Thompson (2010) calls a “winner takes more” model of publishing in which increased resources and promotion are oriented toward fewer titles. Of course, an orientation toward “big” authors and books also puts publishers at increased risk as it legitimizes bigger advances for titles that are assumed to be big sellers. Yet demands on the industry for higher profit margins from conglomerate firms induce publishing houses to use “big” books as a strategy to capture larger market shares, and to try to bring consumers to the book market (e.g. celebrity biographies) who may otherwise not be purchasing books (Thompson 2010). While sales to legitimize large advances are not guaranteed, so far publishers have been willing to take bigger financial risks on titles that might be more dependable and open a wider market, thereby offering bigger rewards.

Yet in some ways this orientation toward big authors and big books has also weakened publishing houses in the publishing supply chain, imbuing select authors and agents with cultural capital (and perceptions of dependable economic returns) and power in the field. As Jason Epstein, former editorial director of Random House noted of this shift:

In effect, name-brand authors are already their own publishers, while their nominal publishers are a vestigial, nonessential convenience, beneficiaries (or victims) of inertia on the part of agents reluctant to forgo the security of a publisher’s guarantee. When the conglomerates tire, as they eventually must, of overpaying these star performers, their agents may choose either to produce their clients’ books themselves or risk losing their golden eggs to business managers who will do the job for them (2002: 20-21).

Through this framework Odyssey Editions can be seen as a move by Wylie that was enabled by a shift in dependence on and belief in the brand-name books that would make up the Odyssey list, but also a move to further enmesh Wylie and his literary agency with the interests of his celebrity authors. While an

orientation toward big books and big authors has kept agents positioned toward publishing houses and their offerings of big advances, it has also created the conditions under which agents and authors can circumnavigate publishers in some cases, should they want to take the risk. Odyssey Editions, a selection of back-list titles with consistent and measurable sales that have already been mined for their revenue through advances, presented a case in which authors and literary agents could reap the gains of an orientation toward big books without losing the financial guarantees of a large advance. Of course, it was the threat to revoke these advances for future Wylie titles that Random House used to quash a potential evolution in the field that would weaken their position.

### The Co-Constitutive Forces of Networks, Cognitions, and Institutions

Although both the popular and industry trade press treated the standoff between Andrew Wylie and Random House as a direct result of the growth of e-books in the marketplace, I argue that this treatment borders on a technologically deterministic stance that overlooks the evolutions of network relationships, cognitive roles, and institutional belief structures across the literary field. While the standoff between Wylie and Random House ultimately resulted in higher percentages for Wylie and his authors on e-book sales, both Wylie's efforts with Odyssey and Random House's response were predicated on evolutions in different sites of social, cultural and economic capital within the field. With regards to networks, Wylie was able to take advantage of his boundary spanning role between authors and publishers, and use this structural power (i.e. social capital) to fill a structural hole that emerged with the rise of Amazon. Wylie's ties to his authors can likewise not be disentangled from his increased role in managing their careers, or from the increased social capital of the brand name authors that made up Odyssey's list. As a result of these concomitant forces, Wylie could attempt to bypass publishers and their ties to mainstream review outlets, as well as their ties to printers, distributors, and retailers, given the tie to Amazon and the limitation of Odyssey titles to the e-book format.

Likewise, the cognitive shifts in roles and the tasks taken on by different firms are also responsible for evolutions in structural arrangements between players in the field. Wylie's ties to authors and activation of a tie with Amazon maximized values by focusing on backlist books that did not require the promotional wing of publishing houses, and had already been exhausted of the economic capital provided by traditional houses through author advances. Wylie, now as career manager and not simply the negotiator of contracts with publishers, could attempt to bypass publishers altogether. Yet Random House, in lieu of filing a lawsuit challenging Wylie's interpretation of earlier contracts, relied on its role in the literary supply chain that other firms, including Wylie, were unwilling to take up: the financial risk of economic capital on individual

titles through advances, and printing, manufacturing, publicity, and distribution costs. Random House did not challenge Odyssey Editions on the grounds of its legitimacy, but instead, applied force by threatening restriction of their social and economic capital for *non-Odyssey* books that Wylie might still want to pass through traditional publishing channels.

The Odyssey standoff can also be considered in wide relief, and as indicative of a historical moment in the literary field in which what are thought to be most desirable authors and that authors that publishing houses are most reliant on – those with brand-names (i.e. cultural capital), speaking tours (i.e. social capital), and previous sales to finance their own books (i.e. economic capital) – are precisely the authors that need publishing houses the least. Publishers, hoping to rely on the capital of authors with pre-existing platforms, are more dependent on authors who, with access to independent contractors, amateur reviewers, and digital sellers, are less dependent on them than at any point in the last hundred years of American trade publishing. This is the case with Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez, who left St. Martin's Press to begin self-publishing her bestselling *Dirty Girls Social Club* series, and Stephen King, who self-published *The Plant* on his website, paying independent contractors, printers and distributors out of his own pocket to also reach print audiences in stores. As publishing consultant Mike Shatzkin noted, "(p)ublishers used to be the gatekeepers...[and although] going through the gate still has certain benefits, it's no longer the only way for authors to get to where they want to go" (Pham 2010: 1). In evidence of the wide effects of these structural transitions Wylie has not been alone in attempting to take advantage of these concomitant forces, as other powerful literary agents (e.g. the Ed Victor Literary Agency, the Curtis Brown, Ltd. agency, and the Blake Friedmann Literary, TV, and Film Agency) have also noticed these structural holes within the industry and taken steps to establish their own boutique backlist publishing houses (Yin 2011). Given these evolutions in the field, through one framework these new boutique publishing ventures by Wylie and other agents can be seen as a push to disintermediate publishers, while in wider relief, they might also be seen as an effort by literary agents to get closer to authors and not be disintermediated themselves.

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